

Pre-Placement Physical Examinations— Asset or Liability?

THERE HAVE BEEN indications in the literature recently of some doubt on the part of those responsible for occupational health programs as to the usefulness of routine pre-employment or pre-placement examinations.

We admit the validity of economic objections to such examinations, namely, cost in time, personnel, and equipment; but wish to point out that the benefits far outweigh the losses mentioned.

A California appellate court rendered an opinion recently involving aggravation of a pre-existing disability where no baseline had been established by the employer. The court advised: "It will be well to be diligent in ascertaining, at the very inception of the employment relation, all available or discoverable facts relevant to the prospective employee's physical condition."

Administrative codes prescribe medical supervision of agricultural workers exposed to injurious materials. An important aspect of this medical supervision is the pre-placement examination—before exposure to organic phosphates.

The need for pre-placement examinations in the interest of protecting the public is certainly established in the case of motor vehicle operators.

There are 25 million women in the work force in this country today. Pre-placement examinations are important in protecting a pregnant woman from any potential hazards of occupation.

The examinations can be a valuable tool for case finding (tuberculosis, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, early malignant disease and other conditions). Disease unknown to the examinee may be discovered early. This is a major contribution, in a preventive sense, of pre-placement examination in industry.

The pre-placement examination can be of great importance in the field of health education. It has been proven effective in getting employees to listen to the benefits of health maintenance.

Laws in certain states, such as New Jersey and California, make it prudent to require a physical examination as a condition of employment. For instance, the unemployment compensation disability policy in the State of California states that an employee's insurance becomes effective on the date he enters employment.

Today we must cope with mental and emotional problems resulting from the isolation created by automation. The problem of determining the emotional status of an employee before placement becomes imperative when he is assigned to machinery representing a capital investment of millions.

The pre-placement examination, as part of an occupational health program, can be beneficial and valuable to all those concerned. The task of physicians, in and out of industry, as members of a world community, is to help keep this a human world. The substitution of a punch card health questionnaire for a good physical examination by a physician in industry, interested in the problems of people, as well as the economics of industry, would not further the objective.

COMMITTEE ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
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Comments and Questions Are Welcomed by the Committee

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